



Kacie Clinton, 7, a 2nd-grade student at the Beethoven School in West Roxbury reads aloud while Celtics player Milt Palacio and her teacher, Sharon O'Brien, wife of head coach Jim O'Brien, listen.

PHOTO BY KATE FLOOR

Celtics visit Beethoven School to encourage students to keep reading

By Deborah Eisner
STAFF WRITER

There is no doubt that Celtics forward Paul Pierce is a tall man, but to second- and third-graders, he's a giant. And when a giant tells you to do something, you do it.

Pierce, guard Milt Palacio along with other members of the Boston Celtics, visited the Beethoven Elementary School in West Roxbury to congratulate the students on their reading skills last week.

A participating school in the NBA's Read to Achieve program, which is run locally in collaboration with the Celtics and ReadBoston, the Beethoven had the best reading record in October among schools in the program. The Read to Achieve program, which encourages students to read at home, is part of 16 elementary schools throughout the city of Boston.

The Beethoven was chosen for this visit because 75 percent of the students participated in the home reading program in October.

"[Reading] doesn't start when you get to college. It starts right

here," Pierce told a class of fourth-graders. "I want to encourage you to try to read a book a day, or at least a page a day."

Pierce is the captain of the Celtics Read to Achieve team and also sits on the national Read to Achieve team.

Pierce said he decided to participate in the literacy campaign because of the value of giving back to his community. "It's just something that's kind of built in me," he said. "I recognize myself as a role model. I just want the kids to realize how important education is."

Each month, Pierce and one other Celtics player will visit one of the 16 participating schools. Pierce and Palacio were joined at the Beethoven by Celtics head trainer Ed LaCerte; Sharon O'Brien, the wife of head coach Jim O'Brien; Stacy Connor, the wife of Celtics assistant coach Lester Connor; and David Woodman, general manager of Fox Sports New England.

Principal James Kirk said he was not surprised to learn that students at the Beethoven had the highest

participation rate. "A big part of the Beethoven program is around the home-reading program," he said.

Kirk said that bringing in celebrities to talk about reading provides an incentive for the kids to participate and helps drive home the point that reading is an integral part of life for everybody. "This is one more way to motivate kids to read at home," he said.

While they were at the Beethoven, Pierce and Palacio read stories to second- and third-graders and then visited the rest of the classrooms.

Palacio said he, too, enjoys getting out into the community and working with kids.

"It's a great way to give back," he said. "Just for kids to see us in the community, to show that we're normal. Education is first and foremost because you are not going to play basketball for the rest of your life."

Beethoven parents were enthusiastic about having the basketball players at the school. "I think it's a good idea," said Kevin Clinton of West Roxbury. "[Seeing Pierce and

Palacio] shows you what you can achieve. Everybody needs to read."

Clinton's daughter, Kacie Clinton, 7, read a book about Thanksgiving to the class and received two front row tickets to an upcoming Celtics game for her efforts. Clinton said he is probably more excited about the prize than his daughter, who he described as an avid reader.

Jeff Zanelli, marketing and community relations manager for ReadBoston said the Read to Achieve program, which is in its first year of operation, is off to a very successful start.

"You need to reinforce that reading is important," he said. "Who better than Paul Pierce and Milt Palacio to come in? It just strengthens our message. Obviously we can talk until we're blue in the face, but if it comes from someone they see on TV and they idolize, it makes a big difference."

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